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QUISLING AS MINISTERPRESIDENT

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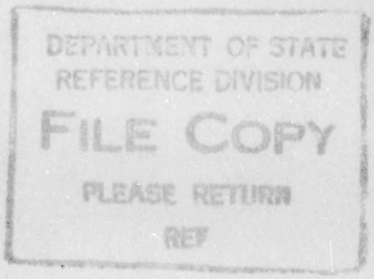

February 9, 1942

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QUISLING AS MINISTERPRESIDENT

SUMMARY

On Sunday, February 1st, Vidkun Quisling was installed as Ministerpresident at Oslo. The Nazis have permitted this step with calculated foresight we may be sure. Several considerations may have motivated this move but we cannot be certain which intentions weighed most heavily until we see more clearly whether the Nazis entrust Quisling with any new power.

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QUISLING AS MINISTERPRESIDENT

We shall have to wait for further developments before we can tell why the German authorities in Norway have endowed Quisling with political office at this particular time. But his assumption of the office of Ministerpresident during the ceremonies at Oslo last Sunday must have been motivated by one or more of the following considerations.

A. Domestic Considerations

1. A desire to regularize Quisling's status. In September 1940, the German authorities replaced the ad interim Norwegian administrative body, with a group of ministers, each in charge of a department. All were supporters of collaboration with the Germans and to that extent henchmen of Quisling (some were members of his party). The expectation was that Quisling would lead the group, but it turned out that no provision was made for any such office as premier. For nearly a year and a half, Quisling's political status has thus been anomalous. His power has been exercised not as the holder of a public office, but as head of his party, Nasjonal Samling. The evidence suggests that Quisling has not been unwilling to assume public office, but the occupying authorities have been hesitant about entrusting him with it--a reluctance we can well understand. His six-day tenure of power in April 1940 seemed to reveal that he completely lacked the confidence of the country.

The action taken on February 1st, may therefore be simply a desire to end the anomalous political status of Quisling. Or it may be a first step to be followed by other political moves, if deliberations, as reported in one quarter [1], have been on for some time to give Norway a new constitution, conforming to her present needs. In any event the title employed is worth notice. Advance reports had loosely employed the phrase "chief of state", but the experience with Vichy may have given this phrase unpleasant connotations, in Nazi ears. In any event, Quisling was made Ministerpresident. As he defined his powers, they would include those of King, Cabinet and Parliament. In his speech of acceptance Quisling announced that "when the time is opportune a national congress representing all walks of life will be summoned". Nor does such a terminology rule out a possibility with which the Nazis have toyed before, namely that of having little Prince Harold, grandson of King Hankon, recognized as King.

2. A desire to strengthen the Quisling faction. The more zealous members of Nasjonal Samling have increasing reason to fear the inflamed anger of their Norwegian neighbors. Russian victories show that the Nazis are not invincible, and British and Norwegian commando raids on the west coast have led party members in the western coastal areas, to call for more protection. The occupying authorities may think it wise at this time to let Quisling have some appearance of power in order to do something to secure better protection for his own henchmen.

3. A chance to shift the onus of unpopular Nazi rule. Much of the hostility of the Norwegian people has been directed at the Quisling puppets rather than at the occupying authorities. The Germans have been hated, but the Quislings held in contempt, a contempt inflamed with each new extension of arbitrary rule. But since September 1941, it has been all too clear that it is the invader and his Gestapo who are essentially to blame for the ensuing bloodshed and terror. The inauguration of executions which have now risen in number to half a hundred,--in a country where capital punishment was abolished--and the several thousand prison sentences meted out, have hardened the Norwegian hatred of the invader. If it can now be made to appear that power actually has been transferred to Quisling, the occupying authorities may think they see a chance unobtrusively to restore certain Norwegian rights and privileges and thus release some of the tension on the inner front.

B. International Considerations

4. The renewed Anti-Comintern Pact. The ceremonies of last Sunday may help to pave the way for Norway's adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact. That Norway was not invited (or not allowed) to join last November, was a source of misgiving to the Quislingites, especially since much was made of the adherence of Denmark and of Finland. But Norwegians were reminded that Norway and Germany were still formally at war. This shortcoming is now to be remedied. Quisling lost no time in stating that "the foremost aim of the National Government is to make peace with Germany"[2]. That should pave the way for adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact, an undertaking which, as is now well known, is aimed not so much against the Communist International as it is designed to fashion as solid a continental bloc as possible, to oppose Russia's political allies, England and the United States. In any event, Norway can be pointed to as the first belligerent to sign a separate piece with the Reich. The Rome radio especially, is emphasizing this probable consequence of Quisling's new appointment.

5. Military considerations. Under this heading the argument may run either way. Perhaps Quisling's hand is to be strengthened, so that the Germans may take more of their troops out of the country for use on other fronts. Or perhaps the Nazis are to be relieved of local problems so that they may give undivided attention to the task of preparing some big offensive, using Norway as one of the bases. The evidence so far is meagre and inconclusive. What there is, tends to support the second contention. Scattered reports suggest that the number of Nazi soldiers in Norway has begun to rise again; it may be significant that General Falkenhorst, after a six-months absence on the Finnish front, has resumed his former command in Norway. Quisling on Sunday reminded his listeners that Norway was "the strategic center of the North", and emphasized that the Fuhrer would not be able to return Norway to the Norwegian circles which before the invasion had acted in the interests of England and Russia.[3] In placing Quisling in public office the Nazis may well have been preparing for, or anticipating, livlier military developments in Norway when the spring

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1. Telegram, January 28, 1942.
2. The New York Times, February 2, 1942.
3. F.C.C. Monitoring Report, February 1, 1942, p. 5.

campaigning begins.

6. Propaganda considerations. The Berlin radio is somewhat short of favorable propaganda material for Europe and America, since Russian successes began to register and the United States entered the war. A well staged ceremony like that at Oslo on Sunday helps to relieve the shortage, momentarily for some of the speeches made good quotations for German consumption. Terboven could not pass by the opportunity to reaffirm again England's guilt in violating Norwegian neutrality. The theme is a threadbare one by now, but he was able to add one brighter patch to it; he quoted in support of his argument a document supposed to have been signed by the primate of the country, Bishop Berggraw, who is leading a united Norwegian church in opposition to Nazi encroachment. Quisling in his turn thanked Germany for the service rendered to Norway in 1940. When quoted over the Berlin radio these assertions may seem plausible evidence to German listeners that the continental solidarity so ardently desired in Berlin is actually taking shape.

7. A thrust at the government in exile. The chief immediate gain of last Sunday's change may turn out to be diplomatic. King Haakon's government in exile has from the outset entrusted its affairs in Berlin and in Helsinki to Sweden. Meanwhile the latter has made no effort to suppress the busy Norwegian Legation in Stockholm. But if Norway and Germany now make peace, the need for any government in exile to be represented diplomatically is obviated; in fact, the concept of any government in exile becomes anomalous.

8. Renewed pressure on Sweden. Quisling's new status may turn out to mean more to Sweden than to his own countrymen. Sweden may be hard put to it to maintain some of her present policies if she is called upon to close the present Norwegian Legation in Stockholm. Worse still will be the situation, ff she is asked to accept a Minister of Quisling's government.

Relations between Stockholm and Berlin have not been good lately, on the ideological front. An increasingly articulate sympathy for the cause of Britain and the United States (though hardly for that of Russia), a more and more cautious attitude toward Finland, and an ever bolder criticism of the Nazi terror in Norway, have been disconcerting to Berlin.[4] It is a setback for the New Order--one whose full measure has not yet been taken by the democracies--that Sweden, faced by Nazi might and flanked by Nazi pressures in Norway and Finland, has so far retained her neutral status. Berlin rightly senses that Sweden takes on new importance in the ideological war, as a possible base of operations for the Allied Nations. This is perceived also in Oslo, and Quisling and his henchmen have in recent months spoken none too gallantly of Sweden. And in his speech of acceptance on Sunday, Quisling clearly warned Sweden to act realistically.[5]

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4. Memorandum "Swedish Opinion of the Finnish Problem" Jan. 28, 1942; Ibid., "Neutral Sweden and the Belligerents," Dec. 27, 1941.

5. F. C. C. Monitoring Report, February 1, 1942, p. 5.

CONCLUSION:

For the moment, it is not clear what Quisling's elevation to Minister-president really portends, but the trend of events should reveal it soon. If he is actually receives a palpable increase of power, then it is the domestic considerations which have counted most heavily. But if the transfer of power proves only nominal, then we may conclude that the Nazis have been interested mainly in securing some advantage in the ideological war in Europe, particularly as it affects Sweden.